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ECHOES FROM THE FIELD

Joe R. Chapel and Ronald A. Crowell

During the past decade research in reading has proliferated. An awareness of the complexity of the problems involved in the teaching of reading has resulted in a tremendous growth in the size of projects through the United States Office of Education, and in greater participation of several disciplines in individual projects, and by the emergence of such new sciences as psycho-linguistics and socio-linguistics. From fiscal year 1957 through 1968, the U. S. Office of Education's Bureau of Research has supported almost 200 reading research projects, for which over ten million dollars have been obligated.

Our knowledge of reading has perhaps improved, but there seems to be a need for integrating what we know, and what we hope to discover. The research already conducted has pointed to the need for tenable theoretical statements regarding the definition and the nature of reading, especially as it relates to the other language functions, and to thinking.

A promising technique for planning and managing these complex research efforts has recently become available to educational researchers. The Convergence Technique, developed by Louis M. Carrese and Carl G. Baker for use in the National Cancer Institute of N.I.H., is now being considered for its first application in reading research by the U. S. Office of Education Bureau of Research. It is hoped that this technique will prove efficacious in the solution to the basic question in reading research: What is reading and how does it work?

The Convergence Technique consists of:

- I. A planning session which initially delineates
 - A. The goal to be achieved by the program
 - B. The subobjectives necessary for the achievement of that goal
 - C. The sequence in which those subobjectives logically move to the goal
 - D. The research needed to achieve each subobjective
 - E. The criteria which must be met in order to conclude that each subobjective has been achieved
- II. A chart which displays the five elements tested above
- III. The use of the Convergence Chart in program management for decisions on:
 - A. Specific research projects to be undertaken
 - B. Movement to the next phase
- IV. Updating and possible revision of the Convergence Chart on the basis of information generated as the research program progresses

Convergence Technique planning results in a graphically displayed list of research tasks and objectives, called a Convergence Chart. The Chart is a skeletal, but highly specific, state-of-the-art document which is frequently updated in light of new research findings. It provides a logical framework for communication about the program. Professional criticism of the plan, proposal writing, and management of the research program are all facilitated by the Chart's concrete display of the program's entire scope and content.¹

An attempt has been made to classify the reading projects into four groups: basic research, language development, instruction, and special populations. Those classified as basic research include studies of various physical phenomena which are believed to occur in reading, readability of materials, verbal learning, and information processing. The language development category includes studies which investigate children's acquisition of various language abilities. The instruction projects include those which compare various approaches to reading instruction, studies of reading readiness, and studies of teaching practices. The studies of special populations are concerned with such groups as mentally retarded children, dyslexic children, Mexican-American, Indians, and Afro-Americans.

The actual application of the Convergence Technique in planning research of the reading process began on August 12, 1968, under the direction of Dr. William J. Gephart, Director of Research Services for Phi Delta Kappa, Inc. The initial planning effort is now complete, but the further development and refinement of the research strategy will continue until the program's final goal is achieved.

Anyone who would like to challenge the logic of the plan, or anyone who feels he has a project that will enhance it, is encouraged to submit data to the United States Office of Education, Bureau of Research.

1. Hjelm, Howard, Albert Storm, and Monte Penney, *U. S. Office of Education Support of Research in Reading*. USOE Bureau of Research. February, 1969.